

Setting Things Right by One Hundred Percent Wrong

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Summary: It's 1987 and Eleven has been living with Hopper ever since her escape from Hawkins Lab. After nearly four years of hiding, she is suddenly thrown into the most dangerous environment known to man: high school. As El adjusts to unfamiliar territory where secrets from her past are harder to keep, she meets a boy named Mike Wheeler, who may also have a few secrets of his own...

Setting Things Right

CHAPTER ONE

The Weirdo at Hawkins High

She was not ready. Despite all of the words of encouragement and pats on the back, Eleven was anything but ready to enter the high school again. Nearly four years of preparation had led up to these moments, where all she had to do was step out her adoptive father's police cruiser and walk through those *very* intimidating doors. If the movies had taught her anything, it's that high school was a dangerous environment, though El had enough understanding of the world to know that movies were just movies. She also knew that she had been stalling in the passenger seat again.

"Hey kid, I can't wait here all day for you," came Hopper's naturally gruff voice as he tried to soothe her uncontrollably overworked nerves. "I've been late to the station for almost three weeks straight now. Eventually, you're gonna have to walk through those doors without my help."

Hopper was right. Sitting in the passenger seat and staring at Hawkins High School forebodingly every morning was not exactly healthy. The only thing was, it *scared* her. Not the school specifically, but the bigger picture. However the television might portray the world around her, there was still a lot that Eleven did not know. High school was only a small part of the unknown, and after being holed up in a lab for her whole life, everything was unknown to her. Learning about the world through the words and wisdom of Chief Jim Hopper was one thing, but being thrown into a completely new environment with people she has never met or seen before was a whole different situation.

Sure, Hopper had taught her as much as he could over the years, but her speech still was not up to par. She still struggled with reading, always finding words she had never heard of. The thought of trying to blend into the rest of society was daunting. Eleven knew she was not ready to be thrown out into the real world yet, but Hopper was still dropping her off at school again anyway. It was almost a

certainty that Hopper also knew she was not yet capable of handling herself, but El was too afraid to question his decision to put her in school regardless. She was well aware that Hopper was nowhere close to being anything like Papa, but being pushed around by adults was all El had ever known. It was best not to question Hopper's authority even if it meant doing something she really did not want to do.

Like the previous couple weeks of school, El silently slipped out of Hopper's police cruiser and closed the door without a word.

Before she could walk away, Hopper rolled down the window. "Meet me here as soon as school is done. Got it?"

El nodded. Hopper drove off toward the station.

That was always the hardest part of the day. It was not necessarily because school scared her to the point where she hid in the solace of the car, but more so the fact that Hopper seemed to have given up on her. Living with him out in the woods with for almost four years was not a horrible time, as he did what he could to raise her well. They still had their moments where they disagreed on something and started throwing insults at each other, but they still got along. Suddenly having to attend a school she was nowhere near ready for just felt like Hopper no longer wanted to be responsible for her. She did not understand why she could not be around Hopper all the time. He was the only person in the world who seemed to care for her yet El felt like in their near four years of companionship, she still did not truly know him.

And he did not truly know her. As far as Hopper was concerned, El was just a kid held captive at Hawkins Lab until it shut down in 1983. Hopper found her as a lost kid in the woods, and the rest is history. But Eleven had never told him the truth.

Hopper did not know about her abilities. Everyone who did was dead.

No one on earth had a clue about her talents and she would like to keep it that way.

Suddenly surrounding herself with the people of Hawkins High was a huge step up in her anxiety factor. The thought of keeping such a huge secret from Hopper was unnerving, but hiding from *everyone* seemed like torture. Though as much as it bothered her, El knew it was not a very rational problem to have because of one reason. She had not used her powers once in all her years since leaving the lab.

Still, as El walked to her first class of the day it felt like one wrong move would reveal everything about her. People would find out that she was just a government experiment and send a whole new squad of bad men after her again. Eleven did not want that. All she wanted right now was to be a normal member of this unfamiliar society, but she did not know how to accomplish that.

As far as schoolwork went, it was easier than she anticipated. The last couple weeks of school had taught her that she excelled in mathematics, she could finish all of her homework, and that she never needed to speak unless she voluntarily put her hand up. Hopper had given her a rundown of what to say on her first day of school, so introducing herself as the new kid in each class had gone rather smoothly, even if she was reading off of an invisible script. Other than that, speaking in school had not been a problem for the last few weeks.

And if anyone asked, English was not her first language. No one had asked yet.

Though the movies and shows on the television had taught her that being the loner kid was a bad thing, El enjoyed it. Not only because it saved her from awkwardly interacting with people she did not know how to talk to, but because she could spend her time observing the way others functioned in a high school environment. It was all so confusing to her though.

As she sat down for lunch in her usual spot away from the crowds, she made her habitual scan of the room. No one outright acted as the high schoolers did on the television. There were still the jocks, the nerdy kids, the popular girls, the druggies, and everything in between, yet they all seemed to meld together. No in-your-face drama about whoever's girlfriend, no fights in the cafeteria. All these people her age wanted to do was blend in with the crowd, even the

wildcards who lived up to their name. She definitely would not claim to be an expert on people after only a few weeks of exposure to the real world, but El could now say that high school was not nearly as scary as she initially thought when she walked through those front doors for the first time. Maybe blending in would not be so hard. People had yet to notice her and El had yet to care.

"Good afternoon class! I realize you've all probably had a busy day at school today, but I need you to do one more thing before heading home. I know this worksheet is a bit much for the last class of the day, so you're welcome to pair up with someone to complete it."

Good. Pairing up with someone is optional.

El watched as the rest of the students in her math class hurried over to their friends in an attempt to snag whichever friend they liked to most. Just observing, the mad dash to see who everyone picked to work with only showed who was really friends with who. Some students were left out, either finding another friend to pair up with or just opting to work alone instead. El thought it was interesting, the way people favored some over others in their group of friends.

Before she could focus her attention back to the handout the teacher just placed on her desk, Mike Wheeler approached her. Yes, she knew his name because watching people all day at school had taught her that she shared most classes with Mike. Despite Hopper suddenly deciding to put her into school a month after the semester started which resulted in El missing orientation, she still learned the names of most of her classmates. This particular classmate was Michael Wheeler, and that was about the extent of her knowledge about him.

"Did you want to work together on this?" he asked, standing beside her desk. "Everyone else is paired up."

That was not true. Not everyone in the class had paired up with someone, as seen by a few other students that were already working away by themselves. El was ready to join the club and fly through the math assignment by herself as she had done a few times before, but Mike's question threw her off-guard. No one ever talked to her, but for some reason, Mike was now asking if they wanted to complete the assignment together. His reasoning did not make any sense.

But someone had actually acknowledged her existence.

"Yes. I will work with you," answered El, cringing at how robotic she sounded. Practicing her speech in the mirror was a lot easier than the real thing.

"Great," Mike smiled, as he slid into the empty desk beside her.

El still did not get why Mike wanted to work with her. Everyone else seemed to want to be around their friends, yet the two of them had never so much as made eye contact before. Confused as ever, she realized they still had to get through this assignment before the end of class. Frowning at the page in front of her, El did not know where to begin. She had never done schoolwork with a classmate before.

"Um, how should we start?" El asked uneasily.

Mike did not look bothered by her skepticism. "Well, we should just split the work fifty-fifty. You can do the even-numbered questions, and I'll do the odds."

Yes, it was very odd. El just nodded and went along with it.

Without a word, they breezed through the assignment and finished in a matter of minutes. There was still plenty of time left in class afterward, which was a pleasant surprise. Everyone else was goofing around with their friends or still working by themselves. As it turned out, Mike happened to be really good at math, yet it did not make it any less strange that he decided to work with her.

"We finished that pretty fast, huh?"

"Yeah." El did not know what else to say.

Mike scratched his head as looked away. "Sorry. You probably think I'm a total weirdo."

Eleven agreed though she kept that to herself.

"I didn't even introduce myself. I'm Mike," he added with an unsure grin, though El already knew who he was.

After a moment, she finally asked, "Why did you want to work with me?"

Mike didn't hesitate. "I thought you could use the company. You're always alone here," he gestured the desks they were seated in, which happened to be at the back of the classroom. "And since you missed the first month of the semester, I thought maybe I could help you catch up a bit. Looks like you already got that covered though. You're pretty good at math!"

It was almost too much for El. That was the most someone had talked to her since her arrival at Hawkins High, and better yet, he had complimented her!

Because Hopper had taught her well, El sheepishly replied, "Thank you."

Mike flashed another infectious smile. "I just wanted you to feel comfortable at school, you know? My friends and I had a tough time here at first, but it's not all that bad." His smile faltered slightly. "I guess things aren't as difficult when there's four of us to handle it. Just know that you don't have to be alone here. It's always good to have a friend."

Nothing came to El's mind. How was she supposed to respond? Why was he so interested in her? What did Mike want? This was the scary part of being thrown out into society. Eleven's only experiences were the treacherous laboratory and the isolated comfort of Hopper's cabin. Nothing made sense anywhere else. Of all the scenarios she imagined dealing with once leaving the cabin, this interaction with Mike Wheeler was not one of them. How could someone she's never met be so nice?

The rest of the class went by without another word to each other. Mike handed in their work to the teacher at the front before sitting back in his original desk on the other side of the classroom and pulling a book out of his bag. During this, all El could think about was the short but impactful exchange they just had. She stayed in a trance-like state right up until Hopper picked her up in front of the school.

"How was that, kid? Getting used to school yet?"

Even if she was upset at Hopper for putting her in school so unexpectedly, she could still sense the sincerity in his tone. He always asked the same question, El always gave the same answer. Though she was about to automatically answer that she was, in fact, growing accustomed to high school, that would have been a lie after today.

"I'm confused," she responded after her moment of thought.

Hopper raised his eyebrows. "Schoolwork giving you trouble? I can still help, you know? Though you probably outta know I wasn't exactly a genius in—"

"It's not that."

"Oh, what's bothering you then?"

El didn't know how to explain it. "Just... people. They are confusing."

Hopper gave her a quick smile. "Yeah, they are. You'll get used to it, kid."

She was confused. And curious.

Of course, this made Eleven spend the next day looking at Mike. Maybe it was because she somehow thought it would reveal his reasoning for being so inviting to her the day before. The fact that they shared most classes was something El noticed a while ago, but now his mere presence now consumed her. He was the only one in the school who had bothered to acknowledge her, and that was enough to awaken some sort of obsession with him and his reasons for being kind. But she didn't know him one bit. That's why she longed to talk to him again.

But she didn't know how to do such a thing.

There was no assignment to bring them together again. What reason would she have to speak to him? What did normal people talk about? All of this proved how little she truly knew about anything.

This is how it was for the next couple of weeks or so. Mike kept to himself in his usual spots around the various classrooms and Eleven just watched. School went on as it did before Mike had shocked her with his friendliness. A few new things were learned about survival in school too. El figured out which bathrooms were kept the cleanest (West wing was closest to the caretakers' office), what days of the week to not bother with the hot lunch served in the cafeteria (Tuesdays and Thursdays always had an indescribably awful soup), how to not get suspended (some red-haired girl put a tack on their chemistry teacher's chair), along with other high school necessities. She still had yet to learn much about Mike though.

Not since their only exchange had Eleven and Mike conversed with one another. But El did learn a few things from her not so subtle spying. Like the fact that Mike didn't show up to school on Fridays. Nothing too unnatural; even Hopper had offered to let El have a day during the week where she took a break from school. Other smaller things about Mike stuck out, such as the same few outfits he wore to school and the fact that he never went to his locker. But there was something that bothered her. Despite claiming to have a close group of friends, she had yet to see them. Much like herself, Mike seemed to always be alone.

Maybe he lied? If he did, Eleven failed to understand why. The previous couple of weeks of silent observing had allowed her to put together the fact that Mike didn't have any friends. Maybe his bluff was just to cover up the fact that he was alone like her. There were too many possible explanations for it and El wanted to know exactly why. What was he hiding?

Whatever it was, Michael Wheeler was a weirdo.